

ARRT Book Club Study

July 16, 2020

Virtual Discussion held via Zoom

The Revisioners by Margaret Wilkerson Sexton

Led by Jennifer Asimakopoulos

Notes by Elizabeth Hopkins

13 participants

*Note- a transcript of our chat can be found [here](#).

Jennifer began by explaining she wanted to discuss the treatment of women in the novel. What does the book reveal about women?

- Enduring strength. How strong women can be through the ages.

What does the novel say about women's relationships with each other?

- They can be very kind and supportive or just as easily disruptive.
- There was a clear divide between white women's relationships with Black women. Very strong to see a Black woman's perspective on that relationship.
- Interesting to see the range of relationships these women had. Josephine and Link's relationship was touching and realistic.

What similarities and differences did you see across the timelines?

- The parents had to teach their kids how to react in their interaction with a white person. This stayed the same between timelines.
- The implication that getting involved with someone of a different race would be difficult.
- A reoccurring theme- a white woman and a Black woman become friends...but the Black woman ends up worse off at the end.
- White people are still looking for ways to control or enslave Black people. That constant fear of being "captured."
- The relationships felt exploited.
- Women in the same stage of life. Being elderly, widowed. Martha and Josephine were in a similar stage of life.
- The tradition of women as healers and how that gets passed down through generations.

Which characters were most or least sympathetic?

- Ava and King were very sympathetic. Ava was such a strong force for her son.
- Charlotte was unsympathetic for obvious reasons. She was so manipulative and she got under my skin.
- Martha was a bit scary. She was not a warm, comforting grandmother.
- Jupiter...we never really figured out what his deal was. I was a little disappointed. The older Josephine was endearing. I liked the delicacy in how the characters were written. Ava felt like the main character I could most relate to.
- I thought about the title as well. Even if you look at it spiritually...we all wonder what our purpose is and where we go after this life. We're always doing things for the next generation. The spiritual thread of "what is this all for?"
- Lots of books about escape from slavery with a magical realism aspect. I don't know much about spiritualism in America, but I wonder if it (magical realism) was used due to the difficulty of the subject matter.
- There is a long cultural history here. A mixture of practices slaves brought over from Africa. They would shield it with the practices of their owners. An important practice for many people to this day.

What does it mean to revision and how does it become the link throughout the novel?

- To revise...you want to change the vision. But it was impossible for them to do much change- so they did the spiritual work for the future generations.

What other themes were present throughout the book?

- Being a mother to a son as he's growing up and becoming an adult.
- The exploration of inheritance. For one family to pass down a magical healing power and another family to pass down racism.
- Income inequality. The difference between Ava and Martha's financial status.

Did any timeline threads stand out or did the author present a balanced point of view?

- The book felt a little incomplete. Ava's timeline wasn't very well resolved. Missing the reality of being a caretaker....Ava had a lot of flexibility to go where she wanted and do what she wanted. There could have been another 200 pages of development.
- I felt like I didn't get to know the characters as much as I could have because it's such a short book.
- Josephine was probably the main character as in she built the foundation of who these women were. Life goes on with the values instilled in her (Ava) through previous generations.

What did you think of the ending?

- I was thinking there has to be a connection between Josephine and Martha. I thought that was an interesting way to show how people's lives hundreds of years ago still affect you today.
- The theme of being a midwife. New life being brought into the world involves women caring for one another.

Who would you give this book to?

- Anyone who enjoys historical fiction.
- People who like well-written literary fiction.
- Patrons who like family sagas.
- Book groups looking for #OwnVoices books.